

Section

1

Europeans Reach the Americas

Main Ideas

1. Explorer Christopher Columbus reached the Americas from Europe in 1492.
2. The Spanish wanted to control the Americas to obtain gold, spread Christianity, and gain glory.
3. In 1519 Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire.

Why It Matters Today

Early explorers sailed uncharted waters and visited new lands. Use current events sources to find information about exploration today, such as space or deep-sea exploration.



TEKS: 1B, 1C, 2B, 20A, 21B, 21C, 21H, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the arrival of Europeans in the Americas.

Key Terms and People

- Christopher Columbus
- conquistadores
- Hernán Cortés
- Moctezuma II

The Story Continues

A cookbook from the 1300s advised cooks to carefully “grind spices . . . [so] you do not lose any speck.” Seasonings were far too valuable to waste. Cooks for wealthy Europeans used salt to help keep meat from spoiling and spices to make rotting foods taste better. Spices and salt were carried to Europe from Asia and Africa across dangerous routes. Merchants in the spice trade risked death in harsh deserts and murder by bandits. Such risks and long journeys made spices very expensive. One pound of salt could cost as much as two pounds of gold!



Columbus Sails to the Americas

The spices so valued by Europeans came from Asia, as did other valuable products such as Chinese silk. The dangers of overland trade routes made such goods costly. As a result, in the late 1400s nations in western Europe raced to find an all-water route to Asia. An Italian sailor named **Christopher Columbus** believed he could reach Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. The idea was daring because no one knew just how big the Atlantic was or what lay beyond it. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain eventually gave Columbus three ships—the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail. As the weeks passed, the crew grew nervous. Then, early on October 12, a lookout cried “Land! Land!” The fleet had reached an island in what is now the Bahamas. Columbus named the island San Salvador, or “Holy Savior.” Although he was nowhere near Asia, Columbus mistakenly believed he was in the Indies. He therefore called the people he met Indians. Later, Europeans realized that Columbus had actually landed near the continent that became known as North America.

Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Why do you think King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were willing to help Columbus?

★ Spanish Conquest in the Americas

Spain’s rulers hoped to expand their empire by taking control of the Americas. The riches and lands of the Americas would add to their nation’s wealth and power. Spain also wanted to spread Christianity to the Americas. To accomplish these goals, Spain authorized private expeditions and sent church officials to the Caribbean. These expeditions were led by **conquistadores** (kahn-kees-tuh-DAWR-ez)—Spanish soldier-adventurers in search of glory, gold, and land.

Conquistadores wore suits of armor and steel helmets in battle. They carried muskets and finely crafted swords. A few rode mighty horses. To Caribbean Indians, who had never seen horses or steel weapons, the conquistadores were a frightening sight. With this advantage and their superior military technology, the Spanish soon conquered many of the Caribbean Islands. They then turned to the American mainland.

Reading Check Summarizing What advantages helped the conquistadores conquer the Caribbean?

That’s Interesting!

Pigs on the Loose

Christopher Columbus and other early explorers carried livestock with them on their trips. This is how the first pigs came to the Americas. Many Spanish explorers let the pigs they brought roam free to live off grasses, nuts, and roots. These pigs turned wild, and their population in the Americas grew quickly. These abandoned pigs provided a source of food for later explorers.

Interpreting Visuals

Contact. Columbus claimed the land he had found for Spain. **According to this painting, how did American Indians react to Columbus’s arrival?**



Interpreting Visuals

Cortés. Cortés led a fleet with 11 ships and about 600 soldiers to Mexico. What technological advantages do you think the Spaniards had over the Aztecs?



KEY DATE 1519

Hernán Cortés establishes the first Spanish settlement on the American mainland.



Cortés Marches through Mexico

In 1519 conquistador **Hernán Cortés** sailed from Spanish Cuba to the eastern coast of Mexico. There he founded La Villa Rica de Vera Cruz, the first Spanish settlement on the American mainland. The settlement still exists as the city of Veracruz. After landing, the Spaniards learned of the powerful and wealthy Aztec Empire, led by **Moctezuma II** (MAWK-teh-soo-mah). Cortés decided to find Moctezuma “wherever he might be. . . [And] take him alive in chains or make him subject to [Spain].”

To make certain his soldiers would not retreat, Cortés sank his ships. He meant to have victory at any cost. However, he faced overwhelming odds. The Aztecs had conquered a vast area and ruled several million people. An Indian woman named Malintzin (mah-LINT-suhn)—also called Malinche (mah-LEEN-cheh)—helped Cortés overcome these odds. With her help, he gained allies among the conquered peoples. Thousands joined Cortés as he marched toward the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán.

After arriving at Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his soldiers marveled at its great size and beauty. One soldier described the city, which was situated in the middle of a huge lake.

TEXAS VOICES



“When we saw all those cities . . . built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, . . . we were astounded. These great towns and temples and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision.”

—Bernal Díaz del Castillo, quoted in *Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire*, by Jon Manchip White

Reading Check Analyzing Information What weakness in the Aztec Empire did Cortés use to increase the size of his army?



VIDEO

The Arrival of the Spanish

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Cortés Conquers the Aztecs

The Aztecs had large amounts of gold, precious gems, and silver. Moctezuma gave Cortés peace offerings from this treasure, but the gifts were not enough. Cortés took Moctezuma captive and considered how to conquer the Aztecs. But before he could act, fighting broke out between the Aztecs and the Spaniards. On the night of June 30, 1520, the Spaniards fled the city. Cortés then planned a new assault. He convinced more Mexican Indians to join him and had his men build boats armed with cannons. In May 1521 the Spaniards and their allies attacked Tenochtitlán. After a long and brutal fight, they defeated the Aztecs in August. Many of the Aztecs were killed or enslaved. Tenochtitlán lay in ruins.

Spain had captured the great wealth and land of the Aztec Empire. The Spanish sent much of the Aztec gold and silver, including treasures, to Spain. On top of the ruins of Tenochtitlán, Cortés built Mexico City. It became the capital of New Spain, which eventually extended from California to Florida to Mexico. Along with the Caribbean Islands, Mexico became a common starting point for Spanish exploration in the Americas. Such exploration increased the size of Spain's empire, which by 1600 included much of North and South America.

Reading Check Comparing How were the Aztec Empire and Spanish America similar?

CONNECTING TO

ECONOMICS AND MATH

Gold and the Spanish Empire

Spanish explorers sent the gold and silver they found in the Americas back to Spain. As the amount of gold in Spain rose, prices of goods also rose. Spain produced few goods itself, so much of its wealth left the country to pay for goods made elsewhere.

The chart below lists the value of gold and silver sent to Spain from the Americas between 1516 and 1660. Use the information to create a bar graph.

YEAR	VALUE OF GOLD AND SILVER
1516–1520	993,000 pesos
1536–1540	3,938,000 pesos
1556–1560	7,999,000 pesos
1576–1580	17,252,000 pesos
1596–1600	34,429,000 pesos
1616–1620	30,112,000 pesos
1636–1640	16,315,000 pesos
1656–1660	3,361,000 pesos

Interpreting Data

- During what years did the value of gold and silver sent to Spain peak?
- By what percentage did the value of gold and silver increase between 1536 and 1560?



Section 1 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- conquistadores

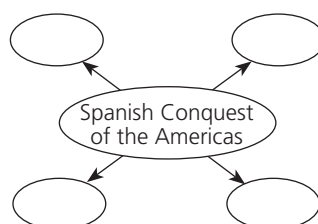
2. Identify and explain

the significance of each of the following:

- Christopher Columbus
- King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella
- Hernán Cortés
- Moctezuma II

3. Summarizing

Copy the web diagram below. Use it to show why Spain wanted to gain an empire in the Americas.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- What did Christopher Columbus accomplish in 1492?
- Why was the building of a settlement in Mexico in 1519 significant?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Sequencing Imagine that you are a member of Cortés's army in 1519. Write journal entries describing your experiences in Mexico. Describe events in their proper order.

Consider the following:

- the march to Tenochtitlán
- the conquest of the Aztec Empire